

# PRINCIPLE REVISIONS TO THE RULES OF GOLF AND DECISIONS

EFFECTIVE 1st JANUARY 2008

## INTRODUCTION.

The R & A together with the USGA publish a fully Revised Edition of the Rules of Golf on a four yearly cycle; the Decisions Book is revised on a biennial basis. Updated versions of both books being published for the 1st of January 2008, the Rules of Golf Book will apply up to the end of 2011, the Decisions until end of 2009. This note is intended to summarise some of the more important changes, of which we need some awareness in our regular daily play. For full details of the all the Revisions, see the actual books. Also included are references to the previous "Conforming Driving Clubs" requirements, which now come into force, throughout the territories of the R & A's jurisdiction. Unusually there are a small number of minor errors in the latest Decisions Book, as a result the R & A have issued an Addendum Sheet, where significant these changes are included below, further details may be found on the R & A website, [randa.org](http://randa.org) .

## WHAT'S NEW FOR 2008.

**A Quick Guide to the Rules of Golf :** This is a completely new section, providing a useful reference to the most common situations likely to be encountered during a round. Players just need to appreciate that the guide only provides an overview, they are not the Rules, often in the more complicated situations which people tend to get themselves into, it will be necessary to know the complete picture and consult the actual wording of the applicable Rule.

**Definition of Advice :** Exchanging information on distance, has been added to items not considered to be advice. Previously (from 2005), Decision 8-1/2 had ruled that a player could ask anyone the distance between his ball and the hole. Decision 8-1/2 now also clarifies the use of distance information derived from rangefinders employed during a stipulated round. When their use is specifically allowed by Local Rule, under a new note to Rule 14-3, the information may be freely used and shared, otherwise if a player obtains distance information, that he knew was measured by anyone with a rangefinder during the round, he is disqualified, (as well as the person concerned if he was a player).

**Lost Ball :** There are some "technical changes" to the definition of a "Lost Ball", in particular the "Standard of Proof" required to allow a ball to be treated as "Lost", when moved by an "Outside Agency" Rule 18-1; in an "Obstruction" Rule 24-3; an "Abnormal Ground Condition" Rule 25-1c; or in a "Water Hazard", has been increased from there being "Reasonable Evidence" to "Known" or "Virtually Certain". These Rules are also amended to reflect this. Decision 26-1/1 has been modified to put some meaning into the judgement required for this new level of proof to be satisfied. The "Lost Ball" definition also includes the case where the player has put another ball into play under "stroke and distance penalty". Whilst this may seem perfectly obvious, Decisions have allowed the player to be deemed to be proceeding under "stroke and distance penalty", when otherwise he may have been liable to additional penalty. A good example is Decision 18-2a/1, here a player teeing off, misses the ball completely, before playing what would have been his second shot, he pushes the teepeg further into the ground, the ball was "in play" he has therefore breached Rule 18-2a and is liable for a one stroke penalty and the ball must be replaced, as he does not readjust the height of the tee peg, he would normally have become subject to a two stroke/loss of hole penalty. The Decision however allows it to be deemed that he was playing under "stroke and distance penalty", hence his next stroke is his third shot. Other similar situations arise where this principle is applied.

**Definition of Matches :** This term has been withdrawn and replaced by equivalent descriptions under the title of "Forms of Match & Stroke Play".



**Exerting Influence on Ball :** A note has been added to Rule 1-2 defining what constitutes a "Serious Breach" of the Rule, a new Decision 1-2/0.5 has been added to discuss where this provision may be applied differently in match play and stroke play.

**Non Conforming Clubs :** The penalty under Rule 4-1 for carrying, but not using a non-conforming club has been reduced from disqualification, to be the same as that for carrying excess clubs, ie 2 strokes or a loss of hole penalty at each hole to a maximum of 4 strokes or 2 holes. A note is also added under Rule 4-1 allowing "The Committee" to place additional requirements on the Driver used by a player. See later comments regarding Conforming Drivers. A new Decision 4-1/5 (replacing 4-2/1) has been included, this Decision which has changed over the years is generally considered to have been based on the disqualification imposed on Sandy Lyle many years ago, following a report made by Nick Faldo. The scope of this decision originally related to adding tape to the top of a club to reduce glare, this had been judged to be altering the playing characteristic of the club, which is not allowed during a round. Under the new decision, it has been determined that any tape fixed to a clubhead, either to reduce glare or for the very common practice of protecting the face of a new "borrowed" or "trial" club, renders the club non-conforming and so must not be carried or used. The tape is considered an external attachment, details of permitted external attachments can be found in the "Guide to the Rules on Clubs and Balls", a joint R & A/USGA publication, it is currently only displayed on the USGA website, usga.com . Interesting to note that tape can be put around part of the shaft to protect it, but not the clubhead. Club Professionals should perhaps be made aware of this stipulation.

**Searching for a Ball :** A reference has been added to Rule 12.1 to include searching in or on an "Obstruction".

**Identifying Ball :** One of the most significant changes, an amendment to Rule 12-2 allows a Ball to be lifted in a hazard for identification. Rule 15-3 has a corresponding change removing the penalty exemption for playing a wrong ball in a hazard. Note, both these provisions relate to a ball being at rest, a ball moving in a water hazard cannot therefore be lifted for identification, playing it remains exempt from penalty, if it turns out to be a wrong ball. Related Decision 12-2/3 has been withdrawn as a consequence.

**Smoothing a Bunker After Playing a Stroke :** The exceptions to the prohibited actions in a hazard Rule 13-4 have been modified. The new thing is, under exception 2, when the player smoothes the sand/soil after making a stroke and the ball remains in the hazard, he is only penalised if the smoothing breaches Rule 13-2 (ie lie of ball, area of stance/swing, line of play, or the area in which he is to drop the ball), with respect to his next stroke. Previously he would be at the more general risk of "assisting the subsequent play of the hole", eg in the event his "next stroke" rebounding back into the smoothed area, he would have been penalised. The note 2, plus a new note 3, also specifically makes it clear that if the ball is outside the hazard after the initial stroke any smoothing etc in the hazard, will not lead to a subsequent penalty, whatever happens thereafter. This latter position has not changed, but it was previously only the subject of a Decision 13-4/38. Unfortunately in the new Decisions Book, the last phrase of the last sentence was not modified, indicating still that a penalty would apply if as a result of a subsequent stroke the ball rolled back to the smoothed area, which is not now correct. The R & A have therefore taken the unusual step of issuing a correction via their website, including the new wording which should be applied.

**Unusual Use of Equipment :** A note has been added to Rule 14-3, prohibiting the "unusual use of equipment", except where such use is in a "traditionally accepted manner". Decision 14-3/6 is modified to reflect this where a ball used to assist a player's grip when putting, it was formerly judged that the ball was an artificial device, it is now "unusual use of equipment". Rule 14-3 also now allows the use of equipment or devices designed for, or having the effect of alleviating a medical condition. Provided that the player has legitimate medical reason and the Committee is satisfied that undue advantage is not gained through its use. New Decision 14-3/6.5 and other revised Decisions apply to this topic. Rule 14-3 also permits, but only under Local Rule, the use of electronic distance measuring devices, this had previously been allowed under Decision 14-3/0.5 introduced in 2006.

**Substituted Ball/Wrong Ball :** An exception note has been added to Rule 15-2 (the corresponding Rules 20-7c and Rule 18 are also similarly affected), to avoid the double penalty when player incorrectly substitutes a ball and plays from the wrong place. The penalty statement under Decision



20-7c/4 is recalculated to reflect this. Note also the new penalty for playing a wrong ball from a hazard as noted previously.

**Standing Astride or on Line of Putt :** This action if taken inadvertently or to avoid standing on another players line was previously permitted under Decision 16-1e/2, Rule 16-1e now includes this exception.

**Ball in Motion Deflected by Player :** An important change has been made to Rule 19-2, reducing the penalty in both Match and Strokeplay to one stroke, if a player, his partner, his/their equipment or any caddy employed by their side accidentally deflects or stops the players ball. The penalty was previously loss of hole or two strokes. Various related Decisions have been changed to reflect the new penalty.

**Ball Placed or Replaced by Wrong Person :** The penalty under Rule 20-3a has been reduced to one stroke, previously the General Penalty under the Rule applied, ie loss of hole or two strokes.

**Removed Flagstick Moved Whilst Ball in Motion :** Previously an "Attended Flagstick" could be moved whilst a ball was in motion, Decision 17-1/6 also allowed the person who had attended and subsequently placed it on the ground to move it, if he thought the player's ball may strike it. Decision 17-1/7 however applied a penalty, if any other person moved a flagstick which had been removed and laid on the ground, ie it was treated as any other moveable obstruction. The penalty, loss of hole or two strokes under Rule 1-2 or 24-1, applied to the unfortunate individual innocently trying to be helpful. Rule 24-1 has now been changed allow such a movement without penalty.

**Other Decisions :** In the new publication there are 37 New Decisions; 192 Revised Decisions of which 59 are considered to have significant change; 15 Withdrawn Decisions and 14 Renumbered Decisions. Where directly pertinent to a Rule change, any major Decisions involved have been mentioned above. Otherwise those who may from time to time be called upon to make a ruling simply have to consult the Book, ensuring that only the current Edition is examined. There are two new Decisions of particular interest to Club Competition Committees which are worth knowing about. Decision 33-7/9 discusses the responsibility of other fellow competitors, ie not the marker of the player concerned, who may observe an uncorrected breach of a Rule. Decision 34-3/9 gives some useful guidance to Committees in the difficult event where they are required to resolve questions of fact. It should also be remembered that the current 2008 – 2009 Edition contains three acknowledged typographical errors and has the incorrect statement referred to previously within Decision 13-4/38.

## **CONFORMING DRIVERS.**

In August 2002, responding to the introduction of Drivers having a significant "Spring Effect" clubface, the R & A introduced a functional test to quantify this characteristic and imposed specific limits. Notice was given that Driving Clubs not conforming to these requirements would not be able to be used in general club play from the 1st January 2008. In the interim, recommendations were issued applying to competitions involving "expert players" suggesting that Drivers with these characteristics should not be allowed under the Conditions of the Competition. Cheshire together with many other Counties introduced this condition in our County Championships in 2006. The USGA actually introduced the requirement to all forms of play from the outset.

Now the requirement has to apply to all forms of play, many club members have been seeking guidance on the application of this ruling. Comprehensive advice is available on the R & A website, including extensive listing of clubs which are known to be "Non-Conforming" and a separate list of clubs which have been tested and defined as "Conforming". The major considerations which Clubs and Players need to be aware of can be summarised below :

1. For normal "Club Golf" it is sufficient that the Driver in question does not appear on the R & A List of "Non- Conforming Drivers".
2. For competitions involving "expert players" ie County Championships and above, it is recommended that under the Conditions of the Competition, an additional requirement is included, specifying that the



Driver Head of the club used by all players should be included on the R & A List of "Conforming Driver Heads". Cheshire are including this requirement in our County Championships.

3. All Drivers manufactured before 1999, are assumed to conform to the rules for "spring like effect" and are deemed to be on the "Conforming List", (providing they have not been modified).

4. It is entirely the responsibility of each player to ensure that his equipment conforms to the Rules of Golf. In County events, unless requested to by the player, we have never examined competitor's clubs on the first tee, we have generally asked players to confirm that their Driver conforms with the Conditions of the Competition, and have a copy of the Lists available for reference if required. During the course of play, if it comes to our notice that a possibly suspect club is being used, the circumstances are investigated and the inevitable disqualification has unfortunately resulted in a small number of cases.

5. In "Club Golf", cloned and other Drivers which may not appear on either list, may be used providing there is no strong evidence to suggest that it does not conform, ie if it has similar markings or only varies in "Loft" from a club on the "Non-Conforming List", or suggested by advertising material. If it is a "direct clone" of a club on the "Conforming List" it may be used for "Club Golf" but cannot be considered to be on the "List", where the additional requirement exists for "expert player" events.

6. Remember that the penalty for carrying but not using a non-conforming club has been reduced from disqualification to the Rule 4.4 application.

7. Note that an Affiliated Club is not permitted to waive the implementation of these requirements.

Whilst it remains entirely at the discretion of Club Committees as to how they may wish to approach this new requirement. We would suggest that the first tee is not the place to address it, Clubs would be well advised to ensure that the topic is adequately publicised throughout their Membership, that the Professional has a proper understanding and perhaps ensures that the up to date Lists are available for reference. This could possibly also be used as a good opportunity to remind your Pro that "taping up" the face of a Driver (or any other club) makes it non-conforming and any player even carrying one in a competition, is liable for penalty, use it and he should be disqualified. As indicated the "Lists" are extensive, just as an example the "Conforming List" runs to over 300 pages, containing almost 50 entries for Taylor Made R7 Drivers. 2008 has also seen the introduction of a further characteristic limit on Drivers, this requires that the moment of inertia of the clubhead under defined conditions, must not exceed a stipulated figure. Whilst there are no specific guidelines as to how this should be determined at Club or County level, it would be reasonable to assume that Drivers meeting the criteria above satisfy the requirement.

CFS

1st February 2008

